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Fall 2017, A Summer of New UNH International Program, An UnBelizeable Experience!

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UNH Global

An UnBelizeable Experience!

Embedding Study Abroad into a UNH Manchester Course Works Well for Students

Patricia A. Halpin, Department of Life Sciences, UNH Manchester

Wednesday, October 18, 2017

Most undergraduate students have an interest in study abroad yet several factors can prevent them from taking advantage of this opportunity. For many, the cost is prohibitive. A second reason is that they cannot fit 'something extra' into their curriculum and still graduate in four years. A third reason may be a lack of information and encouragement.

We tried to address these challenges for Manchester biology and biotechnology majors by developing a new course: BSCI 620 Global Science Explorations. This is the first UNH-M course that embeds the study abroad component into the semester, with the international travel (in this case, Belize was determined to be an ideal location) occurring during spring break. The fee for the study abroad component was made a course fee so that it could potentially be covered by students' financial aid. I held an information session in September about the course and invited both UNH-M's study abroad coordinator and director of financial aid to attend. Students were encouraged to meet individually with the staff to discuss whether their financial aid package would cover the course fee. This type of course and the extra level of advising proved to be successful in Manchester (UNH Durham has a longstanding Integration of the Culture and Agriculture course that embeds a trip to Ireland) with 17 students expressing serious interest and 10 participating in the new program.

During the course meetings preceding the trip, students designed their research studies to be completed during the trip to Belize. Guest speakers came into the classroom each week to provide background information that was beneficial in trip preparation and helped focus expectations.




Students enjoyed every aspect of their adventure: "This experience has opened up my perspective of



UNH-M students explore the jungles of Belize


In Belize, students researched medicinal plants and the mangrove ecosystem (the keystone species of the broad leaf forest of Belmopan) and the benefits it provides to the natural flora of Belize and other topics. Kerri Cobb (Biological Sciences '17) had an eye-opening experience while snorkeling. "My partner and I studied the coral reef in Placencia. We observed that the herbivorous fish there have a mutualistic relationship with the coral. The fish depend on the coral for food and shelter, while the coral depends on the grazing by certain fishes for reproductive success." Upon their return, students presented their findings at the UNH Undergraduate Research Conference (<https://www.unh.edu/urc>). They also made point-of-view videos and presented those at the Undergraduate Research Conference Cinema Arts Day. All in all, the Belize trip was a smashing success!

View a sampling of student blogs:

- Elizabeth Pellerin 
- Kerri Cobb 
- Juan Posada 

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the world around me, and I learned a lot about myself as well," says Elizabeth Pellerin (Biological Sciences '17). "Now I tell students to go on new adventures and to take risks and have an open mind. St. Augustine once said, 'The world is a book, and those, who do not travel, read only one page.'" Elizabeth presented this poster at the UNH Undergraduate Conference .



Belize jungle survival tour--building a shelter out of branches, palm fronds, and vines

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